

The Bears hoist coach George Halas onto their shoulders after their historic championship win in 1940.



MAN AMONG MEN

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, COACHING LEGEND **GEORGE HALAS** LED THE CHICAGO BEARS TO THE MOST LOPSIDED VICTORY IN NFL HISTORY—AND CHANGED THE GAME OF FOOTBALL AS WE KNOW IT. **BY DAWN REISS**

There's a reason George Halas Sr. was called "Mr. Everything." Born in Pilsen, he morphed from a triple-sport star at the University of Illinois and WWI Navy vet into a player-coach at the Decatur-based starch refinery A.E. Staley Manufacturing Company, whose semipro football players became the Chicago Bears in 1920. "He had a vise-like grip for a handshake, a great smile, and eyes that looked you right in the eye, so you knew 'You don't mess with this guy,'" says Jeff Davis, author of the book *Papa Bear: The Life and Legacy of George Halas*. Twenty years later, "Papa Bear," a founding father of the NFL who initially played both ways for Chicago, coached a 1940 season that culminated with a 73-0 victory in the league championship game, cementing the Bears' Monsters of the Midway legacy.

Earlier in the season, the tremendously competitive Halas was livid at a

missed pass interference penalty in a 7-3 loss to the Washington Redskins; three weeks later, after Redskins owner George Preston Marshall called the Bears "crybabies," Halas plastered the newspaper clippings in the locker room before the championship game. "The players told me you could hear a pin drop on that train ride from Chicago to Washington," Davis recalls. "He wasn't an inspirational speaker; he was very matter of fact: 'You have trained, you know what you need to do, go out and get 'em,' type of speech." Chicago scored on the second play and never looked back, scoring 11 touchdowns, including three on interceptions. "It was sweet revenge," says Bears chairman George McCaskey, the grandson of George Halas Sr., calling the final score "the most famous score in sports history." And Halas knew it, saying after the game, "It was one of those things that will never happen again." **MA**